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INFOSYSTEMS

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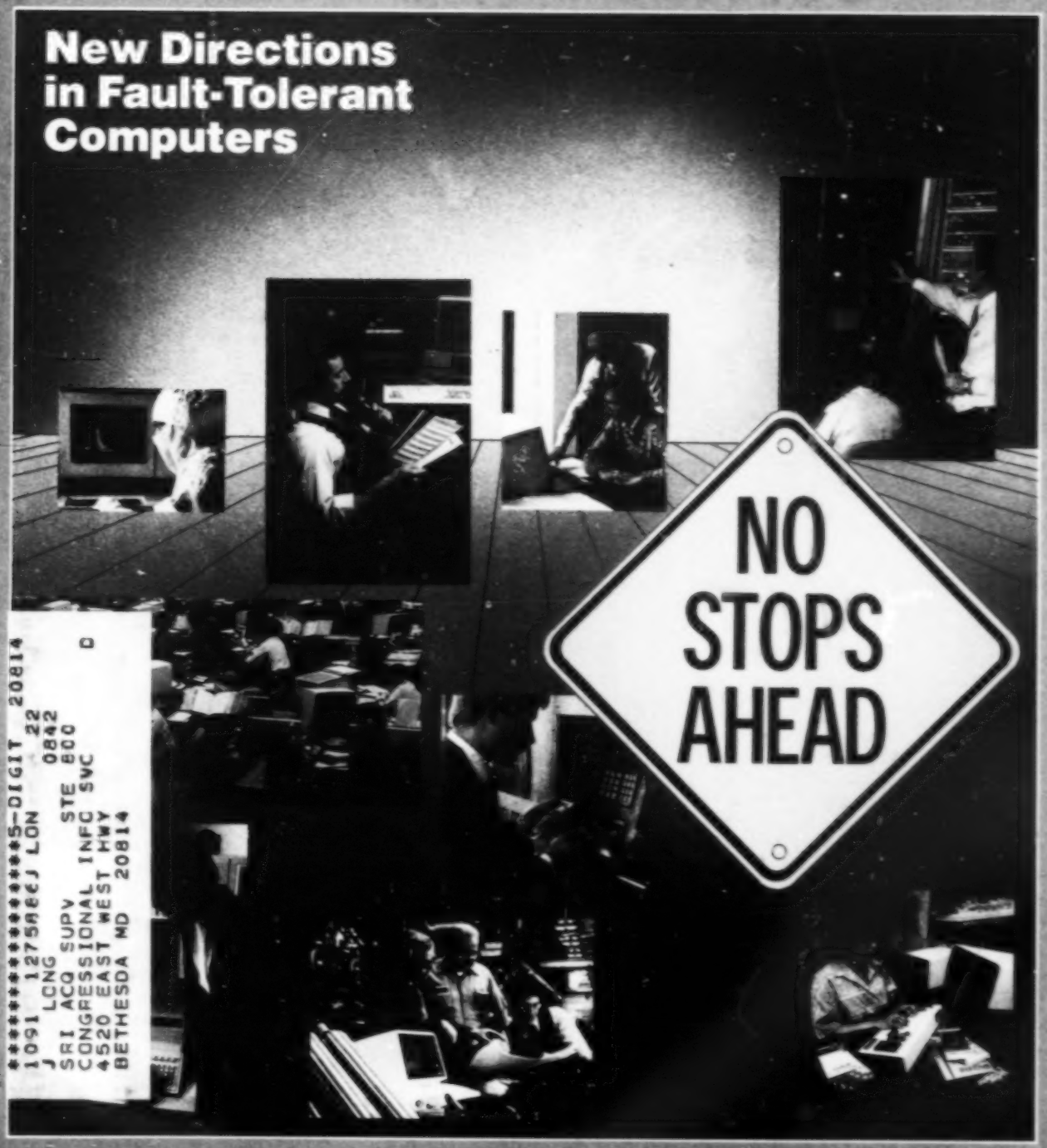
Critical Success Factors • Power Protection Systems

Moving Data Entry to End Users

New Directions in Fault-Tolerant Computers



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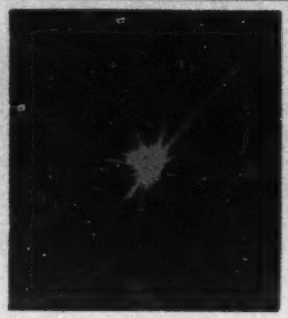
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Automating

"We found that it was necessary to introduce technology on a deliberate phased basis," he says. "To implement a new technology when there is everday work to be done is a difficult task."

At Customs & Excise, Bell Northern Research designed a voice/data-oriented system. Two digital PBX switches, one in Toronto and one in Ottawa, supported 100 workstations split almost evenly between the two offices. Managers received Displayphones while knowledge workers were given VT-100 terminals with a phone featuring an auxiliary data module.

While Commins was pleased with the overall results of the trial and plans to expand the concept to include other regional offices, he does not believe office automation technology can be maximized until more research is available.

"There are a lot of good systems out there but I don't think we really know how to use them yet," Commins explains. "The problem is that we really don't understand the basics of the work process. We think we understand work but we really don't."

Commins thinks this is particularly true of managers. "Direct use of office automation by management will be limited because most managers do not make decisions on hard data. Most of that analysis happens at lower levels," he theorizes. "Managers make decisions based on what I call 'soft information' which includes factors like the advice of peers and colleagues. But managers will benefit from improved information flow." (N)

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A 'Rising Star' Instills Boredom

After catapulting to prominence in elite management circles, the rising young star's reputation began to lose some of its luster. The reasons were vague: inability to adjust to the demands of new surroundings, failure to perform up to expectations, and worse yet, eliciting boredom from top management. The result: demotion back to a more clerical position.

The preceding scenario is not that of an ill-fated, ladder-climbing young executive. It is the story of the rise and apparent decline of the desktop computer within corporate management.

While some analysts had hinted that management's love affair with desktop computers would not be an enduring relationship, a survey by The Omni Group is one of the first studies to provide statistical support. Among the survey's conclusions is that in more than 60 percent of Fortune 1000 companies, managers have begun to delegate computer-oriented tasks to support staff.

Sponsored by 13 computer-related firms, including a number of industry heavyweights, *TechTrends '85: Inside the American Office* was designed to investigate "undercurrents of change with respect to the impact of office technologies on white-collar workers," according to David Cushing, associate director of research at the New York City-based information technology research and consulting firm. The results were based on more than 3,000 interviews with computer users, planners and purchasers throughout US business.

"The TechTrends findings suggest that managers and professionals who use computers are getting tired of inputting numeric data," says Director of Research Dr. Warren Waldbrand. "Personal computing tends to glamorize clerical work, and managers have begun to realize it."

Financial applications are the most frequently delegated tasks. "Although managers value the results of office computing, such as the bottom line of a spreadsheet, they often consider computer use to be boring," explains Cushing. "In fact more than one-third of managers and executives surveyed cited 'boredom' as a critical problem associated with computer use."

This problem is compounded by the feeling of many managers that maintaining proficiency on office computers requires too much time. As a result, Waldbrand sees a "lingering frustration among managers who use office computers. To regain growth curves of the past few years, computer vendors need to address this problem."

While many managers may be finding that their desktop computers are not living up to original expectations, others never allowed themselves room for disappointment. They were simply never convinced that they needed a desktop computer in the first place.

Of nonuser managers surveyed, almost half expressed doubt that using an office computer would raise their productivity. Almost one-fifth did not believe computers were even appropriate for their job.

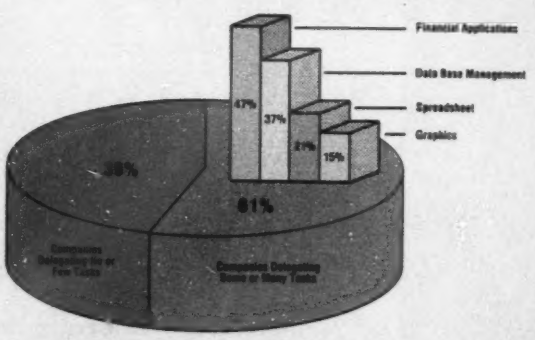
"Although computer use among executives and managers has mushroomed in the last several years, a large portion of potential users remain unconvinced of computer benefits," says Waldbrand. "This lingering mistrust of computers helps explain the recent wave of less-than-positive financial reports from some of the nation's leading computer companies."

The market slowdown in office computers is also linked to management information systems/data processing (MIS/DP) increasing control over office system purchasing. According to the survey, MIS now controls purchasing of office systems in 57 percent of Fortune 1000 companies and personal computer software in 74 percent.

"With major new responsibilities for strategic purchasing, MIS/DP departments have put the brakes on uncontrolled computer buying in the office," theorizes Waldbrand. "They are most familiar with the large computer systems, and we think many MIS groups still focus their efforts there rather than on the office."

Cushing believes this may change as office computers become seen as integral components of larger systems controlled by MIS. The key to this integration is local area networks (LANs). Almost half of Fortune 1000 companies surveyed have installed LANs among at least a portion of their computer users. By next year, the study predicts, more than 80 percent will have LANs, even if only on a small, pilot-project basis. PBX-based communications also are expected to expand rapidly. (N)

Delegation of Professional/ Managerial Tasks to Support Staff in Largest Service and Industrial Companies



Source: The Omni Group